

Germany and the outbreak of the Second World War.

WAS HITLER TO BLAME FOR THE SECOND WORLD WAR?

Hitler intended to unite all German-speaking peoples. This went against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, but one reason for Hitler's popularity in Germany was his determination to reject the treaty. Having brought all Germans into one Reich, (one state), would be to build an empire. This foreign territory, which he called "living space" would probably be in eastern Europe. It would be seized from people like the Poles and Russians, whom Hitler regarded as inferior.

Hitler's plan for the Nazi state was that it should be totally organised for war.

STEPS TO WAR, from 1933 to 1937.

Leaving the League, 1933.

This action made it obvious that if Hitler was going to be stopped, it would not be through the League.

Germany's neighbours.

All Europe seemed united in opposing him. The weaker countries with German minorities like Poland and Czechoslovakia were closely linked in alliance to France. Hitler's propaganda machine tried to show that these alliances 'hemmed Germany in', Hitler also used them as an excuse for rearmament.

Austria, 1934.

It was not only German-speaking it was also Hitler's own birthplace. In 1934 he arranged for Austrian Nazis to kill the Austrian Chancellor. The Nazis then invited Hitler to become ruler of Austria. The attempt failed when Mussolini sent Italian troops to the Austrian border to prevent a German take-over. Germany was too weak to undertake a war with anyone, so Hitler backed down. He would have to increase Germany's strength and make an ally of Mussolini.

Rearmament.

By 1935, Goering had built up an air force. Military service was introduced, and the German army provided itself with the latest weapons, tanks, battleships and submarines. All this was contrary to the terms decided at Versailles. With the Depression several countries were solving their unemployment problems by strengthening their armed forces and giving government contracts to arm factories.

The Rhineland, 1936.

It had been demilitarised by the Treaty of Versailles, in March 1936, German troops marched confidently into the Rhineland. If the troops had met any opposition in the reoccupation of the Rhineland, they would have been withdrawn.

German rearmament had not yet made Germany strong enough to oppose France. France did nothing because it was split into several groups which were struggling for power Britain wouldn't help France. The French generals had decided to rely on a defence policy with the Maginot Line. Several French generals were sympathetic to fascism and not hostile to Hitler.

The Spanish Civil War, 1936.

The right wing General Franco led an armed rebellion against the Spanish Republican government. Hitler and Mussolini regarded the rebellion as part of the fight against Communism, both sent men and supplies in large quantities to help Franco. The attitude of France and Britain was non-intervention. Hitler and Mussolini signed an alliance in 1936, the Rome-Berlin Axis. Later that year, Hitler signed an alliance with Japan called the Anti-Comintern Pact, this was against Russia. Mussolini joined in 1937 and the line-up of one of the sides of the Second World War was complete. The German armed forces were soon stronger than Britain's and France's. Britain and France began to rearm.

Czechoslovakia, 1938 to 1939.

Hitler called on Henlein, leader of the Sudetenland (German-speaking fringe of Czechoslovakia) Nazis, to stir up trouble there. Czechoslovakia was a democratic country with a determined President to lead it, a strong army and alliances with Britain, France and Russia. Hitler continued to threaten war.

Appeasement.

The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain flew to meet Hitler to see if peace could be achieved by discussion. Hitler was willing to talk: he demanded the Sudetenland for Germany, on the grounds that it was a German-speaking area. Chamberlain agreed. This attitude is called appeasement.

Chamberlain and Mussolini called a third meeting, at Munich. Here representatives of Germany, Britain, France and Italy agreed to hand the Sudetenland over to Germany. Czechoslovakia was weakened, Poland and Hungary also took the opportunity to seize parts of the country at the same time. In Munich 1938, Hitler's army marched into the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Britain didn't have the weapons, planes, guns or tanks for a large-scale war in 1938. Some people sympathised with Hitler at this stage: they felt that Germany had been badly treated at Versailles. They also felt that Russia was a much greater menace than Hitler and admired his anti-Communist stand. The worst part of appeasement was that Chamberlain was prepared to allow the destruction of Czechoslovakia in order to preserve peace.

Chamberlain felt that Hitler had a few reasonable requests to make which, if granted, would be the end of the matter. Hitler thought the British would never go to war. When it became clear in March 1939 that appeasement failed, Chamberlain joined France in alliance with Poland.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939.

The only country which could effectively stop Hitler from seizing Poland was Russia. Stalin had been frantically trying to join Britain and France in an alliance against Hitler. This two refused to have anything to do with Communist Russia. Stalin signed a Non—Aggression Pact with Hitler: both sides agreed not to attack the other. The Nazi Soviet Pact also contained secret clauses agreeing to carve up Poland between them.

This Pact made the Second World War inevitable, because of Britain and France`s alliance with Poland. The Pact only lasted two years and then Hitler attacked the USSR. The war between them broke Hitler's rule and propelled the USSR to superpower status for 50 years afterwards.